

Black Is White

by
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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—In the New York home of James Brood, Daines and Riggs, his two old pensioners and comrades, await the coming of Brood's son, Frederic, to learn the contents of a wireless from Brood, but Frederic, after reading, throws it into the fire and leaves the room without a word.

CHAPTER II.—Brood and his wife arrive. She was Frederic's liking at first meeting. Brood shows dislike and veiled hostility to his son.

CHAPTER III.—Lydia and Mrs. Brood meet in the parlor, where Lydia works as Brood's secretary. The room, dominated by a great gold Buddha, Brood's father's gift, is crowded in oriental magnificence. Mrs. Brood, after a talk with Lydia, which leaves the latter puzzled, is disturbed by the appearance of Ranjab, the Hindu servant of Brood.

CHAPTER IV.—Frederic tells Lydia Desmond, his fiancee, that the message announces his father's marriage and orders the house prepared for an immediate homecoming. Mrs. Desmond, ill-humored, remembers her father's East Indian stories and firm belief in magic, tears unknown evil.

CHAPTER V.—Mrs. Brood makes changes in the household and gains her husband's consent to send Mrs. Desmond and Lydia away. She tries to fathom the mystery of Brood's separation from his first wife before her death, and his dislike of his son, but fails.

CHAPTER VI.—Mrs. Brood fascinates Frederic. They visit Lydia and her mother in their new apartment. Mrs. Brood begins to fear Ranjab in his uncanny appearances and disappearances and Frederic, remembering his father's East Indian stories and firm belief in magic, fears unknown evil.

CHAPTER VII.—Ranjab performs feats of magic for Daines and Riggs.

CHAPTER VIII.—Frederic's father, jealous, unjustly orders his son from the dinner table as drunk. Yvonne, Frederic's sister, to apologize to his father and the guests for his alleged lapse, which puzzles the father. Brood tells the story of Ranjab's life to his guests. "He killed a woman," who was unfaithful to him.

CHAPTER IX.—Yvonne plays with Frederic's infatuation for her, and when her husband warns her that the thing must not go on tells him that she still loves his dead wife, whom he drove from his home, through her, Yvonne. He calls her a sorceress.

CHAPTER X.—Yvonne plays with Brood, Frederic and Lydia as with figures on a chess board. Brood, madly jealous, tells Lydia that Frederic is not his son, and that he has brought him up to kill his happiness at the proper time with this knowledge.

CHAPTER XI.—Frederic takes Lydia home through a heavy storm and spends the night at her mother's house.

CHAPTER XII.—Frederic's wavering allegiance to Lydia is strengthened by a day spent with her.

CHAPTER XIII.—Yvonne, over the phone, rouses Frederic's infatuation for her again. Lydia goes to beg Brood not to tell Frederic of his uncanny parentage, but is turned from her purpose.

years—is not that so? I am not the original cause, am I? It began long ago—long ago!"

"Oh, I beg of you, Mrs. Brood," began Lydia, shrinking back in dismay.

"You are free to speak your thoughts to me. I shall not be offended. What has he said to you about Frederic—and me?"

Lydia resolved to take the plunge. Now was the time to speak plainly to this woman of the thing that was hurting her almost beyond the limits of endurance. Her voice was rather high-pitched. She had the fear that she would not be able to control it.

"I should be blind not to have observed the cruel position in which you are placing Frederic. Is it surprising that your husband has eyes as well as I? What must be his thoughts, Mrs. Brood?"

She expected an outburst, a torrent of indignation, an angry storm of words, and was therefore unprepared for the piteous, hunted expression that came swiftly into the lovely eyes, bent so appealingly upon her own, which were cold and accusing. Here was a new phase to this extraordinary creature's character. She was a coward, after all, and Lydia despised a coward. The look of scorn deepened in her eyes, and out from her heart rushed all that was soft and tender in her nature, leaving it barren of all compassion.

"I do not want to hurt Frederic," murmured Yvonne. "I—I am sorry I—"

"You are hurting him dreadfully," said Lydia, suddenly choking up with emotion.

"He is not—not in love with me," declared Yvonne.

"No," said the girl, regaining control of herself. "He is not in love with you. That is the whole trouble. He is in love with me. But—can't you see?"

"You are a wise young woman to know men so well," said the other indignantly. "Have never believed in St. Anthony."

"Nor I," said Lydia, and was surprised at herself.

"Do you consider me to be a bad woman, Lydia?" Her lips trembled. There was a suspicious quiver to her chin.

"No, I do not," pronounced the girl flatly. "If I could only think that of you it would explain everything and I should know just how to treat you. But I do not think it of you."

With a long, deep sigh, Yvonne crept closer and laid her head against Lydia's shoulder. The girl's body stiffened, her brow grew dark with annoyance.

"I am afraid you do not understand, Mrs. Brood. The fact still remains that you have not considered Frederic's peace of mind."

"Not yours," murmured the other, absently.

"Nor mine," confessed Lydia, after a moment.

"I did not know that you and Frederic were in love with each other until I had been here for some time," Mrs. Brood explained, suddenly fretful.

"What kind of a woman are you?" burst from Lydia's indignant soul. Have you no conception of the finer, nobler—"

Yvonne deliberately put her hand over the girl's lips, checking the fierce outburst. She smiled rather plainly, as Lydia tried to jerk her head on one side in order to continue her reckless indictment.

"You shall not say it, Lydia. I am not all that you think I am. No, no, a thousand times no. God pity me, I am more accursed than you may think with the finer and nobler instinct. If I were not so, do you think I should go where I am now?—crying here like a beaten child? No, you cannot understand—you never will understand. I shall say no more. It is ended. I swear on my soul that I did not know you were Frederic's sweetheart. I did not know—"

"But you knew almost immediately after you came here," exclaimed Lydia, harshly. "It is not myself I am thinking of, Mrs. Brood, but of Frederic. Why have you done this abominable thing to him? Why?"

"I—I did not realize what it would mean to him," said the other, desperately. "I—I did not count all the cost. But, dearest Lydia, it will come out all right again, I promise you. I have made a horrible, horrible mistake. I can say no more. Now, let me lie here with my head upon your breast. I want to feel the beating of your pure, honest heart—the heart that I have loved. I can tell by its throbs whether I will ever soften toward me. Do not say anything now—let us be still."

It would be difficult to describe the feelings of Lydia Desmond as she sat there with the despised though to be adored head pillowed upon her breast, where it now rested in a sort of confident repose, as if there was safety in the very strength of the young girl's disapproval. Yvonne had twisted her like body on the chaise longue so that she half-faced Lydia. Her free arm, from which the loose sleeve had fallen, leaving it bare to the shoulder, was about the girl's neck.

For a long time Lydia stared straight before her, seeing nothing, positively dumb with wonder and acknowledging a sense of dismay over her own disposition to submit to this extraordinary situation. She was asking herself why she did not cast the woman away, why she lacked the power to resent by deed as well as by thought. Life—marvelous, adorable life rested there on her breast. This woman had hurt her—had hurt her wantonly—and yet there came stealing over her, subtly, the conviction that she could never hurt her in return. She could never bring herself

to the point of hating this wondrous, living, breathing, throbbing creature who pleaded, not only with her lips and eyes, but with the gentle heartbeats that rose and fell in her throat.

After a long time, in which there was conflict, she suddenly pressed her warm lips to Yvonne's. Then in an abrupt revulsion of feeling her arms fell away from the warm, sweet body and almost roughly she pushed Yvonne away from her.

"I—I didn't mean to do that!" she gasped.

The other smiled, but it was a sad, plaintive effort on her part. "I knew that you would," she repeated.

Lydia sprang to her feet, her face suddenly flaming with embarrassment. "I must see Mr. Brood. I stopped in to tell him that—" she began, trying to cover her confusion, but Yvonne interrupted.

"I know that you could not help it, my dear," she said. Then, after a pause: "You will let me know what my husband has to say about it?"

"To—say about it?"

"About your decision to marry Frederic in spite of his objections?"

Lydia felt a little shiver race over her as she looked toward the door.

"You will help us?" she said, tremulously, turning to Yvonne. Again she saw the drawn, pained look about the dark eyes and was startled.

"You can do more with him than I," was the response.

CHAPTER XIV.

Sensations.

Lydia stopped for a moment in the hall, after closing the door behind her, to pull herself together for the ordeal that was still to come. She was trembling; a weakness had assailed her. She had left Yvonne's presence in a dazed, unsettled condition of mind. There was a lapse of some kind that she could neither account for nor describe even to herself. The black velvet coat that formed a part of her trig suit, hung limply in her hand, dragging along the floor as she moved with hesitating steps in the direction of James Brood's study. A sickening estimate of her own strength of purpose confronted her. She was suddenly afraid of the man who had always been her friend. Somehow she felt that he would turn upon her and read her, this man who had always been so gentle and considerate—and who had killed things!

Ranjab appeared at the head of the stairs. She waited for his signal to ascend, somehow feeling that Brood had sent him forth to summon her. Her hand sought the stair rail and gripped it tightly. Her lips parted in a stiff smile. Now she knew that she was turning coward, that she looked to put off the meeting until tomorrow—tomorrow!

The Hindu came down the stairs quickly, noiselessly.

"The master says to come tomorrow, tomorrow as usual," he said, as he paused above her on the steps.

"It—it must be today," she said, doggedly, even as the thrill of relief shot through her.

"Tomorrow," said the man. His eyes were kindly inquiring. "Sahib say you are to rest." There was a pause. "Tomorrow will not be too late."

She started. Had he read the thought that was in her mind?

"Thank you, Ranjab," she said, after a moment of indecision. "I will come tomorrow."

Then she slunk downstairs and out of the house, convinced that she had failed Frederic in his hour of great need, that tomorrow would be too late.

Frederic did not come in for dinner until after his father and Yvonne had gone from the house. He did not inquire for them, but instructed Jones to say to the old gentlemen that he would be pleased to dine with them if they could allow him the time to "change." He also told Jones to open a single bottle of champagne and to place three glasses.

Later on Frederic made his announcement to the old men. In the fever of an excitement that caused him to forget that Lydia might be entitled to some voice in the matter, he deliberately committed her to the project that had become a fixed thing in his mind the instant he set foot in

the house and found it empty—oh, so empty!

Jones' practiced hand shook slightly as he poured the wine. The old men drank rather noisily. They, too, were excited. Mr. Riggs smacked his lips and squinted at the chandelier as if trying to decide upon the vintage, but in reality doing his best to keep from coughing up the wine that had gone the wrong way in a moment of profound paralysis.

"The best news I've heard since Judd died," said Mr. Dawes, manfully. "Fill 'em up again, Jones. I want to propose the health of Mrs. Brood."

"The future Mrs. Brood," hissed Mr. Riggs, wheezily, glaring at his comrade. "Ass!"

"I'm not married yet, Mr. Dawes," exclaimed Frederic, grinning.

"Makes no difference," said Mr. Dawes, stoutly. "Far as I'm concerned, you are. We'll be the first to drink to Lydia Brood! The first to call her by that name, gentlemen. God bless her!"

"God bless her!" shouted Mr. Riggs. "God bless her!" echoed Frederic, and they drained their glasses to Lydia Brood.

"Jones, open another bottle," commanded Mr. Dawes, loftily.

Frederic shook his head and two faces fell. Right bravely, however, the old men maintained a joyous interest in the occasion. The young man turned moody, thoughtful, the unwonted exhilaration died as suddenly as it had come into existence. A shadow crossed his vision and he followed it with his thoughts. A sense of utter loneliness came over him with a swift, near that sickened, nauseated him. The food was flat to his taste; he could not eat. Self-commiseration stifled him. He suddenly realized that he had never been so lonely, so unhappy in all his life as he was at this moment.

His thoughts were of his father. A vast, inexplicable longing possessed his soul—a longing for the affection of this man who was never tender, who stood afar off and was lonely, too. He could not understand this astounding change of feeling. He had never felt just this way before. There had been times—and many—when his heart was sore with longing, but they were of other days, childhood days. Tonight he could not crush out the thought of how ineffably happy, how peaceful life would be if his father were to lay his hands upon his shoulders and say, "My son, I love you—I love you dearly." There would be no more lonely days; all that was bitter in his life would be swept away in the twinkling of an eye; the world would be full of joy for him and for Lydia.

When he entered the house that evening he was full of resentment toward his father, and sullen with the remains of an ugly rage. And how to be actually craving the affection of the man who humbled him, even in the presence of agrivants! It was unbelievable. He could not understand himself. A wonderful, compelling tenderness filled his heart. He longed to throw himself at his father's feet and crave his pardon for the harsh, vengeful thoughts he had spent upon him in those black hours. He hungered for a word of kindness or of understanding on which he could feed his starving soul. He wanted his father's love. He wanted, more than anything else in the world, to love his father.

Lydia slipped out of his mind. Yvonne was set aside in this immortal moment. He had not thought of them except in their relation to a completed state of happiness for his father. Indistinctly he recognized them as essentials.

As he was lonely. The house was as bleak as the steppes of Siberia. He longed for companionship, friendship, kindness—and suddenly in the midst of it all he leaped to his feet.

"I'm going out, gentlemen," he exclaimed, breaking in upon an unappreciated tale that Mr. Riggs was relating at some length and with considerable fierceness in view of the fact that Mr. Dawes had pulled him up rather sharply once or twice in a matter of inaccuracies. "Excuse me, please."

He left them gaping with astonishment and dashed out into the hall for his coat and hat. Even then he had no definite notion as to what his next move would be, save that he was going out—somewhere, anywhere, he did not care.

Somehow, as he rushed down the front steps with the cool night air blowing in his face, there surged up within him a strong, overpowering sense of filial duty. It was his duty to make the first advances. It was for him to pave the way to peace and happiness. Something vague but disturbingly tormented him with the fear that his father faced a grave peril and that his own place was beside him and not against him, as he had been in all these ill-directed years. He could not put it away from him, this thought that his father was in danger—in danger of something that was not physical, something from which, with all his valor, he had no adequate form of defense.

At the corner he paused, checked by an irresistible impulse to look backward at the house he had just left. To his surprise there was a light in the drawing-room windows facing the street. The shades in one of them had been thrown wide open and a stream of light flowed out across the sidewalk.

Framed in this oblong square of light stood the figure of a man. Slowly, as if drawn by a force he could not resist, the young man retraced his steps until he stood directly in front of the window. A questioning smile was on his lips. He was looking up into Ranjab's shadowy, unsmiling face, dimly visible in the glow from the

street lamp. For a long time they stared at each other, no sign of recognition passing between them. The Hindu's face was as rigid, as emotionless as if carved out of stone; his eyes were unwavering. Frederic could see them, even in the shadows. He had the queer feeling that, though the man gave no sign, he had something he wanted to say to him, that he was actually calling to him to come back into the house.

Undecided, the man outside took several halting steps toward the doorway, his gaze still fixed on the face in the window. Then he broke the spell. It was a motion on his part, he argued. If he had been wanted his father's servant would have beckoned to him. He would not have stood there like a graven image, staring out into the night. Having convinced himself of this, Frederic wheeled and swung off the street once more, walking rapidly, as one who is pursued. Turning, he waved his hand at the man in the window. He received no response. Farther off he looked back once more. The Hindu still was there. Long after

he fled to him. They were not in the audience, they had not even contemplated coming to this theater. He had been tricked, deliberately tricked. No doubt they were seated in some other place of amusement, serenely enjoying themselves. The thought of it maddened him. And then, just as he was on the point of tearing out of the house, he saw them, and the blood rushed to his head so violently that he was almost blinded.

He caught sight of his father far down in front, and then the dark, half-obscured head of Yvonne. He could not see their faces, but there was no mistaking them for anyone else. He only marvelled that he had not seen them before, even in the semidarkness. They now appeared to be the only people in the theater; he could see no one else.

James Brood's fine, aristocratic head was turned slightly toward his wife, who, as Frederic observed after changing his position to one of better advantage, apparently was relating something amusing to him. They undoubtedly were enjoying themselves. Once more the great, almost suffocating wave of tenderness for his father swept over him, mysteriously as before and as convincing. He experienced a sudden, inexplicable feeling of pity for the strong, virile man who had never revealed the slightest symptom of pity for him. The same curious desire to put his hands on his father's shoulders and tell him that all was well with them came over him again.

Involuntarily he glanced over his shoulder, and the fear was in his heart that somewhere in the shifting throng his gaze would light upon the face of Ranjab!

Long and intently his searching gaze went through the crowd, seeking the remote corners and shadows of the foyer, and a deep breath of relief escaped him when it became evident that the Hindu was not there. He had, in a measure, proved his own cause; his emotions were genuinely his own and not the outgrowth of an influence for good exercised over him by the Brahmin.

He began what he was pleased to term a systematic analysis of his emotions covering the entire evening, all the while regarding the couple in the orchestra chairs with a gaze unswerving in its fidelity to the sensation that now controlled him—a sensation of impending peril.

All at once he slunk farther back into the shadow, a guilty flush mounting to his cheek. Yvonne had turned and was staring rather fixedly in his direction. Despite the knowledge that he was quite completely concealed by the intervening group of loungers, he sustained a distinct shock. He had the uncanny feeling that she was looking directly into his eyes. She had turned abruptly, as if some one had called out to attract her attention and she had obeyed the sudden impulse. A moment later her calmly impersonal gaze swept on, taking in the sections to her right and the balcony, and then went back to her husband's face.

Frederic was many minutes in recovering from the effects of the queer shock he had received. He could not get it out of his head that she knew he was there, that she actually turned in answer to the call of his mind. She had not searched for him; on the contrary, she directed her gaze instantly to the spot where he stood concealed.

Actuated by a certain sense of guilt, he decided to leave the theater as soon as the curtain went up on the next act, which was to be the last. Instead of doing so, however, he lingered to the end of the play, secure in his conscienceless espionage. It had come to him that if he met them in front of the theater as they came out he could invite them to join him at supper in one of the nearby restaurants. The idea pleased him. He nodded it until it became a sensation.

When James Brood and his wife reached the sidewalk they found him there, directly in their path, as they wedged their way to the curb to await the automobile. He was smiling frankly, wistfully. There was an honest gladness in his fine, boyish face and an eager light in his eyes. He no longer had the sense of guilt in his soul. It had been a passing qualm, and he felt regenerated for having experienced it, even so briefly. Somehow it had purged his soul of the one lingering doubt as to the sincerity of his impulses.

"Hello!" he said, planting himself squarely in front of them.

There was a momentary tableau. He was vividly aware of the fact that Yvonne had shrunk back in alarm, and that a swift look of fear leaped into her surprised eyes. She drew closer to Brood's side—or was it the jostling of the crowd that made it seem to be so? He realized then that she had not seen him in the theater. Her surprise was genuine. It was not much short of consternation, a fact that he realized with a sudden sinking of the heart.

Then his eyes went quickly to his father's face. James Brood was regarding him with a cold, significant smile, as one who understands and despises.

"They told me you were here," faltered Frederic, the words rushing hurriedly through his lips, "and I thought we might run in somewhere and have a bite to eat. I—I want to tell you about Lydia and myself and what—"

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

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He Was Looking Up Into Ranjab's Shadowy, Unsmiling Face.



Lydia Stopped for a Moment in the Hall.

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